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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 ADDIS ABABA 002921

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DEPARTMENT FOR AF DAS YAMAMOTO AND AF/E
LONDON, PARIS, ROME FOR AFRICA WATCHER
CJTF-HOA FOR POLAD

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TAGS: PREL PINS MOPS MASS KPKO ET ER SO

SUBJECT: PUNTLAND VICE PRESIDENT URGES SUPPORT FOR SOMALI
TFG

REF: A. ADDIS ABABA 2910
1B. ADDIS ABABA 2872
1C. ADDIS ABABA 2775

Classified By: CHARGE D'AFFAIRES VICKI HUDDLESTON. REASON: 1.4 (D).

11. (C) SUMMARY. Puntland Vice President Hassan Dahir Mahamud blamed Islamic extremists in Somalia's Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) for fanning Ethio-Somali tensions in order to destabilize Somalia's Transitional Federal Government. He claimed that the current (EPRDF) GOE had done much to reduce Somalis' antipathy toward Ethiopia and pointed to the strong commercial and cultural ties that now exist between Somalia's Puntland region and Ethiopia's Somali regional state. The CIC now posed a direct threat to Puntland and Somaliland, he said, as well as to southern Somalia: foreign fighters and Arab financing backed the CIC, while the UNSC arms embargo hampered international support to the legitimate TFG. In addition to calling for lifting the arms embargo, Mahamud recommended the provision of financial assistance and training to the TFG and Puntland. Strengthening Somali capacity for administration and self-defense would go further than Ethiopia acting alone, he said. Mahamud noted that Puntland had defeated Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys and his fighters in 1993, and was prepared to do so again, if given international assistance. Mahamud was pessimistic that talks between the TFG and CIC would result in any feasible power-sharing arrangements. END SUMMARY.

12. (C) On October 31, Pol-Econ Counselor and Deputy met with visiting Puntland Vice President Hassan Dahir Mahamud during the latter's visit to Addis Ababa. Mahamud was accompanied by Puntland intelligence officer Mahad Farah Gas.

CLOSE COMMERCIAL TIES BETWEEN ETHIOPIA AND PUNTLAND

13. (C) Asked about historical tensions between Ethiopia and Somalia, Mahamud acknowledged enmity between Siad Barre and Emperor Haile Selassie, but said that Somali authorities had always enjoyed a close relationship with Ethiopia's ruling Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front (EPRDF). He recalled that EPRDF guerrilla leaders had even been provided with Somali passports when they fought against the Mengistu regime. He noted that both Mengistu and Somali dictator Siad Barre had fallen from power within months of each other, in 1991. Since then, the EPRDF had given Somalis

their own regional state in Ethiopia, headed by their own regional president and with the right to secession. Mahamud noted that he had first met Ethiopian Foreign Minister Seyoum six months earlier in Sudan; he planned to meet with deputy Foreign Minister Tekeda Alemu and other GOE officials later in the week.

¶4. (U) Mahamud cited close cross-border cultural and commercial ties between Puntland and Ethiopia's Somali region. Some Darod sub-clans were split along both sides of the Ethio-Somali border, he added. Citing open traffic along the 450 km border between Ethiopia and Puntland, Mahamud explained that he was leading a Puntland government delegation visiting Addis Ababa to conclude a memorandum of understanding between Puntland and Jijiga, capital of Ethiopia's Somali regional state. "We have the port, and they have the market," he said. While Garowe was its political capital, Puntland was focusing on developing infrastructure in its business center, Bossaso: not only refurbishing its port to handle ships of up to 1,500 tonnage, but also constructing an airport capable of handling Boeing 747 aircraft.

U.S. ASSISTANCE NEEDED TO DEFEND AGAINST ISLAMIC EXTREMISTS

¶5. (C) Mahamud said it was Hawiye clan Islamicists of the Council of Islamic Courts (CIC) who sought to fan what had been fading Ethio-Somali tensions. Islamicists were instigating a new civil war, especially in southern Somalia, he said. Puntland considered itself a federal state under Somalia's Transitional Federal Government (TFG) and had no

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plans for secession; on the contrary, Puntland sought to be part of a united Somalia, and possibly even an economic union with other nations in the Horn of Africa. Puntland was now threatened by clan-based Islamicists and needed to raise a large military force to defend its population of 2-3 million, Mahamud said. CIC fighters were now only 90 km from Galcayo. While there would be popular opposition to the CIC within Puntland, some would seek to ally themselves with the CIC to for personal gain, he added. Mahamud noted that Puntland had previous experience in confronting and defeating CIC leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys. According to Mahamud, in 1993, Aweys had invaded Bossaso and had even captured Abdullahi Yusuf (currently TFG president), but Bosaso residents then repulsed Aweys and his forces, killed 800 of his fighters, and disarmed and expelled the remainder.

¶6. (C) Mahamud appealed for financial assistance so Puntland could purchase weapons and ammunition, "like Eritrea is doing," and called for the United States to push for lifting the UNSC arms embargo on Somalia. Ethiopia could push back the CIC, but could not go far without strong Somali forces, Mahamud said. As the CIC was already getting weapons, the arms embargo only weakened the legitimate TFG, he said. Foreign fighters from Iran, Iraq, Palestine, and Afghanistan had come to assist the CIC and would not be easy to expel. The CIC's recent declaration of jihad against Ethiopia encouraged Arab financing of the Islamic extremists, but Eritrea's support remained "the most dangerous." Mahamud asserted that Eritrea supply flights were landing twice daily in Mogadishu to deliver weapons and trainers, and he questioned why the United States was not doing more to stop it. Mahamud said he had had limited engagement with U.S. authorities; he had not been in contact with any USG officials in Nairobi, and only occasionally encountered CJTF-HOA personnel in Bossaso.

¶7. (C) While there was no need for direct U.S. military intervention, the USG could do more to help the Transitional Federal Institutions (TFIs), Mahamud said, especially by providing financial assistance and training. The TFG collected no revenue from taxes, he noted. With USD 20-30

million and advisor/trainers, the TFG could form an effective administration and remove the threat of the CIC, Mahamud said. To defend transitional institutions, the TFG required well-equipped armed forces; such armed forces and the police also needed salaries. The vice-president also recommended on-the-ground international advisors to the TFG that could help get quick traction on governance and maintain accountability for assistance provided. Currently, the EU provided funds for parliament, but not for developing Somalia's civil service, he said. Mahamud challenged the assertion that the CIC was more proficient in administration than the TFG, noting that disputes between Ayr and Abgal sub-clans over revenues had recently shut down the port of Mogadishu; port operations had shifted to El Maan, 4.5 km north of Mogadishu. The TFG was now nominating directors-general of ministries in an effort to create a viable administration, and seeking to implement Prime Minister Ghedi's six-month plan which called for reducing national ministries to 31. The TFG was hampered by poor security conditions and by lack of grassroots organizations: half of the members of the Transitional Federal Parliament came from the Diaspora, Mahamud explained, reducing their effectiveness to date in establishing real links with their constituents in Somalia. In contrast to the TFG, Puntland authorities were able to raise some revenue from tax collection: "We can sustain ourselves; no one helps us," he said. It would have been preferable for the USG to have assisted the TFG, Puntland, and Somaliland, than to have wasted its efforts supporting a coalition of warlords, he said.

¶8. (C) "Anyone who is against the Islamicists must support the TFG," Mahamud declared. Defeat of the TFG would mean the defeat of Somaliland and Puntland as well, Mahamud warned, with civil war and a disastrous reprise of the chaos following 1992 likely to continue. Intelligence officer Mahad Farah Gas agreed that to avert such disaster, it was imperative for the international community to back the TFG. Otherwise, "the whole region will be on fire." The Government of Yemen was already backing the TFG, Mahamud

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said, as Yemeni extremists backed the CIC. In contrast, Djiboutian President Ismail Omar Guelleh had close business connections with CIC Islamicists, Mahamud said. He predicted that if the CIC prevailed, they would tolerate Guelleh's administration for only a limited time before seeking to destabilize Djibouti as well.

ISLAMICISTS' TIES TO ETHIOPIAN INSURGENTS

¶9. (C) CIC leader Sheikh Hassan Dahir Aweys enjoyed a long-term relationship with Eritrea, Mahamud said, having trained fighters in Eritrea who later came to Merka (southwest of Mogadishu). Aweys also maintained ties with Ethiopian insurgent groups, including the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) and Oromo insurgents. Mahamud asserted that ONLF rebels did not use Puntland as a base for operations against Ethiopia. Puntland authorities had an agreement with the GOE to expel captured ONLF rebels. Puntland did not arrest them or turn them over to the GOE, he said, because they were members of the same Darod sub-clan dominant in Puntland. He remarked that Somaliland in contrast had extradited ONLF members to Ethiopia, which had "only created problems" for Somaliland's government. ONLF leaders were primarily in the diaspora, and the ONLF had little support in the Ogaden, Mahamud claimed. He noted that Puntland had sought to mediate between the GOE and ONLF over the last two years, but that such efforts had not succeeded. A splinter group operating under the umbrella of the ONLF, the "Ogaden Islamic Movement," was affiliated with the extremist al-Ittihad al-Islami (AIAI) and rejected dialogue with the GOE. The differences over whether to engage with the GOE had split the ONLF into several factions, Mahamud

added.

SOMALILAND INDEPENDENCE "ILLOGICAL"; COOPERATION STUCK

¶110. (C) Questioned about Puntland's relations with secessionist Somaliland, Mahamud expressed distrust of Somaliland, but recognized that its stability was beneficial for Somalia. Nevertheless, he said, it was "illogical" to recognize Somaliland's independence, since "a clan cannot be a nation." He asserted that Somaliland had no distinct identity until 1960, other than its Isaak-dominated Somali National Movement (SNM), and said that Somaliland was currently claiming territory from colonial boundaries that it had never controlled. Mahamud noted that he himself came from the disputed region between Puntland and Somaliland. When asked about potential cooperation between Somaliland and Puntland against the CIC, the vice-president said that he favored sharing intelligence and collaborating in other areas, but claimed Somaliland was unwilling. (Note: GOE Somali-watcher Fiseha Shawel disputed Mahamud's account, saying he was one of the barriers to cooperation; see ref A.)

¶111. (U) BIO-NOTE: Hassan Dahir Mahamud stated that he was an undergraduate at Leningrad University in the former Soviet Union and later held a fellowship at Canada's McGill University. A fluent English speaker, he previously worked for the UN Development Program (UNDP) in New York, on a project related to Somalia. A former member of the Somali Salvation Democratic Front (SSDF), Mahamud opposed the Siad Barre regime from Ethiopia. He became Puntland Vice President in 2004. He enjoys drinking Coca Cola and smokes Benson and Hedges cigarettes with a cigarette holder.

HUDDLESTON